

# Life Is A Highway (I Wanna Ride You All Night Long)

## by Vulcanodon

**Category:** IT (Movies - Muschietti)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - No Pennywise (IT), Fluff and Humor, M/M, Mutual Pining, Porn With Plot, Racecar Driver Eddie, Really Quite A Lot of Porn

**Language:** English

**Relationships:** Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2019-12-01

**Updated:** 2019-12-01

**Packaged:** 2019-12-18 05:05:19

**Rating:** Explicit

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 14,803

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

After three years of screwing around with Eddie behind everyone's backs, Richie decides to put a stop to the with-benefits part of their friendship. It's the smart thing to do, the logical thing to do and has NOTHING to do with the Eddie nearly dying in a car crash at work.

Three months later, he gets blackmailed by a scuzzy L.A gossip hound and everything gets fucked up all over again.

“And it had all been great, easy breezy and what the kids called no-strings-attached except for that one string, the huge tangled string of Richie being desperately in love, the same string that had eventually wrapped around his neck and was half choking him to death by the time he called it off.

Because Richie had been the one to call it off in the end. So, this is all his fault really, and if his heart is a little bit broken then hey, that's just the way the cookie crumbles. “

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## Author's Note:

So, with my last fic, I made a big melodramatic speech being like, 'It is with a heavy heart that I must retire from the reddie fandom yadda yadda' and then my idiot brain was like 'What if Eddie was a racecar driver lol'.

So yeah, this is mostly sex and none of the racing stuff is in any factual or well-researched, but I had a lot of fun writing it! If you felt the same way reading it, or felt any kind of way about it really, then don't hesitate to comment! 😊

Richie is running late on four hours of sleep when the reporter corners him outside of Starbucks, so maybe he's not as nice as he could have been.

In retrospect, that could have made a difference to how things panned out.

"Richie! Richie Tozier! Hi, can I have a moment of your time?" The guy says, and he's not sticking a camera in Richie's face, but Richie just has to take one look to know exactly who he is.

Baby faced, with his blonde hair all slicked back and a slightly too earnest expression, the guy screams, *wannabe Fox News presenter*, from his shiny shoes to the iPhone clasped in his hand, finger hovering over the recording button.

“Please.” Richie says. “Richie was my father’s name- call me Mr Tozier.”

“Um, okay.” The guy says, face all scrunched up and Richie doesn’t even have the energy to enjoy being mean to this guy.

“Look I need to be somewhere five minutes ago, I don’t really have time for this.” Richie tries to say and then the kid actually steps into his path, blocking his way.

“I’ll make it quick, I promise,” He says, holding up his hands. “I write this blog, look I can show you the website, and it would really mean a lot to just have one second of your time.”

Part of Richie wants to look at his watch and go, *One, there you go: now fuck off*, but he’s also aware he’s been in this position before, young and hungry and harassing people in search of that one big break. So instead Richie just sighs and takes a sip of his Ultra Caramel Frappuccino with two extra shots in it.

“Fine. Yeah. Shoot. What do you wanna know?” He asks. “My favourite colour is red. I like the musical stylings of Britney Spears and my biggest inspiration is Gandhi. Or my mother, whatever sounds better.”

“I uh, actually wanted to ask about Edward Kaspbrak. The... the race car driver?” The guy stutters out and Richie blinks at him.

Richie doesn't know what to be more thrown by; the fact this guy has to specify who Eddie is, like Richie would somehow forget a guy he's been friends with for his whole life or the *Edward*. No one calls Eddie that, not even his asshole mother. Richie's pretty sure even Eddie's forgotten what his name is short for at this point.

"Uh, yeah what about him?" Richie says dumbly and then suddenly it occurs to him that maybe something's happened. Something bad.

He's always vaguely anticipating it, the day that he turns on his phone to read about Eddie spinning out or flipping his stupid fragile car or the three thousand and *whatever* horsepower engine exploding under him. Richie always wondered how he'd get the news, whether it would be a news website or Bev's voice over the phone or if he would just watch it happen right in front of him, just like last time.

Maybe it'll happen like this; some asshole asking him for a statement on the street.

"Is he okay?" Richie asks, not quite keeping the panic out of his voice. "What happened? Where is he?"

"He's fine, he's fine, Rich- uh, Mr Tozier." The kid stutters out, stepping back. "I just know the two of you are friends, right?"

"Yeah. Bosom buddies." Richie snaps out, relaxing a little.

This isn't the first time he's been asked about Eddie. It gets brought

up on chat show interviews, where some asshole who thinks he's clever will bring up a paparazzi pic of Richie, Eddie, Bev and Bill hanging out and make some crack like, *What do they put in the water down there in Maine? You guys all made it pretty good huh?*

When this happens Richie will inevitably have to smile and try hard to ignore the fact they've nearly always cut Stan and Mike off in the frame.

But everyone knows he and Eddie are friends, though no one knows just *how* friendly they were for a while. Not even the other Losers know about that, about the illicit hand jobs and late-night booty calls and all the stupid sneaking around.

Not that it matters anymore because that ship has long sailed. Three months now and counting.

*And that's fine*, Richie reminds himself, *That's just A-Okay*.

"So I just wanted to ask, I mean, I was wondering if you had a statement on this." The kid says and then he's pulling up his phone and jamming it in Richie's face.

"Wait, hold on." Richie says, squinting and fuck, maybe he needs to change his prescription, *again* and then the photo on the screen comes into focus.

Richie takes a long look and then tries to say something. He makes a strange sort of strangled noise instead and when he looks over, the

reporter is actually blushing a little.

“What. The Fuck.” Richie says.

“I thought um. Maybe this would be something you’d be interested in seeing?” The guy says and he can’t even look Richie in the eye, the cowardly fuck.

“Where? What?” Richie starts and then takes a breath and gets ahold of himself. “When was this taken?”

It’s a dumb question; he’s knows exactly when this was taken, it was taken after Eddie’s last big race about three months ago. Eddie had been humming with adrenaline, tipsy off the champagne and the win and he hadn’t even waited till they were inside Richie’s apartment to kiss him. At the time Richie had found it incredibly hot, Eddie’s eyes so fucking big and dark and how hungry he seemed for it, how desperate, but even then, he had thought, *maybe it’s dumb to do this in the street.*

He hadn’t said that though, he had said, *God, Your mouth Eds*, or something equally eloquent and lo and behold, it had been a dumb fucking idea after all.

Maybe the dumbest idea they’ve ever had.

“I’ve been holding onto this for a while now.” The guy says, in a low voice like they’re in some kind of gangster movie. “I’ve been trying to

get in contact with you.”

“So what is this?” Richie asks flatly. “You got the big scoop huh? You want me to give a little soundbite to go with it? You want me to act like I’m not being thrown out of the closet by some wet behind the ears, Jimmy Olsen-wannabe *douchebag* who uses too much hair gel?”

“No one has to be outed.” The guy mutters, and he’s still holding up the fucking phone, like Richie hasn’t already got the image burned onto his retinas by now. “Not you. And not Edward Kaspbrak either.”

“*Eddie*, you unbelievable prick, it’s Eddie.” Richie says and then he takes in the information properly. “Wait, are you fucking- are you *blackmailing* me right now?”

“Look, I just wanted to let you know about this and see if we could work something out.” The guy says, setting his jaw. “I’ve seen your stuff- your image isn’t exactly compatible with something like this. And as for a professional racer- I mean that’s a pretty macho scene, right?”

The kid pauses then, like that’s all the implication he needs, like he doesn’t even need to say the threat out loud. There’s something slimy about it, like maybe he’s getting off a little on the power trip. Whatever it is, it’s making Richie’s skin crawl.

On the screen, a tiny pixelated Eddie is pushing him up against the door, leaning up on his tiptoes to kiss him. It’s not even that explicit except for the fact he has his hand on Eddie’s ass but in the picture, Eddie is smiling, free and easy with no idea someone was watching

them.

Eddie hasn't looked at him like that for weeks now. He probably never will again if this goes viral.

"Look, dude. Let's not make this a big deal," The guy says and he's actually smiling now, the smug asshole. "I could have just sold this story but I came to you first, yeah? I'm not the bad guy here- I'm actually a big fan."

Richie breathes out hard through his nose, tries to control his temper and then fails.

"Fuck you." He spits out and then he's slapping the phone out of the guys hands where it smashes on the pavement. A lady walking two little dogs nearby squeaks in surprise and hurries on.

"What the hell, man?" The not-reporter says, looking down at the smashed glass. "What was that for? You know I have iCloud right"

"Yeah? Go fuck yourself with it." Richie says and then walks off, putting his hand out for the taxi.

As he leaves, he can see someone filming and that's just fucking great, this day is just wonderful, and the worst part is his coffee is stone cold when he tries to take a sip.

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“So you’re beating up the paparazzi now?” Stan says mildly over the phone that evening. It’s not a question.

“Yeah. I guess I am.” Richie says morosely.

He scrolling down an article with the headline, *Is It Time To Take out The Trashmouth? Comedian Caught In Public Assault.*

The picture below is a blown up still from the video that’s been popping up all over Twitter since this morning. When he scrolls down, Richie watches himself in tiny gif form, smashing the phone again and again and again.

“What happened?” Stan asks gently. “Were they asking if you and Beverly were having an affair again?”

“No.” Richie sighs. “I love it when they do that. That’s actually *funny*.”

“So what? You were just cranky?” Stan asks and then says something muffled into the background.

“Say hi to Patty for me.” Richie says glumly.

He should eat something. What he really wants is a drink but that’s a

bad fucking idea.

“She’s says hi back.” Stan tells him, a moment later. “And also that you shouldn’t smash people’s phones.”

“Oh thanks. That’s good advice. I’ll try to remember that one.”

“So, is there a reason you don’t want to tell me what happened?”

Richie pauses. “Yes. But it’s not like, a bad one. It’s stupid. I don’t know, I’m just going to take my lumps and go to celebrity jail.”

“Is he pressing charges?” Stan ask, alarmed.

“No. I mean metaphorical celebrity jail. Where people write think pieces on the internet about how much of a dick you are.”

There’s a pause and then Stan asks hesitantly, “Have you talked to Eddie recently? I saw him yesterday and-“

“Yeah, yeah we talk.” Richie says quickly. “You know what he’s like- I can’t get him to shut up. Oh fuck is that the time?”

“Rich-“ Stan starts, long suffering and then Richie is blowing loud kisses down the phone.

“Love you lots, gotta go, bye.” He says and hangs up.

There’s a message from an unknown number on his phone. When he opens it, there’s that picture again, coming back like a bad dream, but this time there’s a little note attached. The address of a P.O box and a sum of money that makes Richie’s eyes hurt to look at.

He looks down at the phone for a long time after that, until the picture gets blurry in front of him and then he gets up to pour himself that drink after all.

The first thing that Beverly says to him at brunch the next day is, “You look like shit. Also, talk to Eddie.”

“Oh wow, don’t comfort me in my time of need or anything.” Richie says bitingly. “And why should I have to talk to him? If he wants to talk to me, he can call. I have a phone; he has a phone. We all have fucking phones.”

Beverly rolls her eyes and takes a bite of her bagel. “God, you’re both so annoying. That’s exactly what he said.”

“He’s more annoying.” Richie grumbles and his mouth twists down because yeah, it’s true, Eddie’s a brat but also Richie misses him so badly it hurts a little.

“Are you ever going to tell me what happened?” Beverly asks gently and Richie wants to, he really does.

What happened is this: they were fucking and now they are not. It’s really that simple.

It had started about three years ago and they had kept it nice and casual, all the same friendship stuff exactly the way it had always been. Richie still went to Eddie’s races and Eddie still came to his shows and they still had long pointless arguments about where to eat afterwards.

Except suddenly, *miraculously*, Richie was allowed to take Eddie home at the end of the night, he was allowed to jerk him off and suck hickies into his neck and watch Eddie come around his dick, in restaurants and washrooms and hotels and once, memorably, Bill’s apartment when they were supposed to be house sitting.

And it had all been great, easy breezy and what the kids called *no-strings-attached* except for that one string, the huge tangled string of Richie being *desperately in love*, the same string that had eventually wrapped around his neck and was half choking him to death by the time he called it off.

Because Richie had been the one to call it off in the end. So, this is all his fault, really and if his heart is a little bit broken then hey, that’s just the way the cookie crumbles.

“Nothing’s happened.” Richie says, and takes an aggressive bite of his Danish. “We’re just busy people. I have my adoring crowds and Eddie has his, whatever, death machines.”

“So, it’s not about the crash?” Beverly asks, quirking her eyebrow. “Because you guys haven’t been hanging out much since then.”

“Oh, the crash?” Richie says, keeping his voice light. “I forgot all about it. Are we still talking about that?”

This is such a bald-faced fucking lie that Richie thinks God might just strike him down here and now in this overpriced brunch place, but Beverly lets it slide, taking a cool sip of her green tea.

“I miss Ben.” She says sadly. “He’s better at dealing with your bullshit than me.”

“He’ll be back soon.” Richie says, patting her on the hand. “I think you’re doing a great job.”

“Oh, shut up.” Beverly says but she’s smiling.

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(The history of how Richie feels about Eddie isn't really that complicated in itself.

Around three decades ago, Richie had met Eddie in a hot school classroom at the end of summer. Eddie was wearing a pastel pink polo shirt and still carrying around an inhaler that didn't work and Richie had broken his glasses for the fifth time that month. Bill, who had known both of them separately, had enlisted Eddie's help in finding pieces of scotch tape to piece the bits of broken frame together.

As a result, Richie remembers their first meeting as a pink twitchy sort of blur coming suddenly into sharp focus and then he had seen at all once, the life-shattering reality of the freckles on Eddie's nose.

His big brown eyes had been just inches away, his mouth all twisted up into a worried line and he had said, *Is that better? How does it look?*

*Like a hundred bucks*, Richie had said quite honestly and then, *Gee thanks Doc*.

They were inseparable from this point forward, all through the long endless summer of their Derry childhood and then, more surprisingly, after that too.

Richie goes to college and tries some stand up at an open mic night; somehow this becomes a career. It turns out that Richie is good at making people laugh.

Eddie goes go-kart racing one time as a teenager because Beverly drags him along; somehow this also becomes a career. It turns out that Eddie is good at driving very, very fast.

Somewhere in all of this Richie falls in love. It could have been in college, watching Eddie wipe off the mouth of his beer bottle before tipping back his head to swallow. It could have been after Eddie's first big win, watching Eddie climb out of the car and wave at him in the stands. It could have been in that classroom all those years ago; it's hard to tell now because Richie is so used to the feeling of being in love it's almost like trying to remember a time he didn't breathe.

But it's okay, it's not important and though they never mention it, Eddie clearly doesn't feel the same way, and Richie dates around and it's fine, it's all pretty manageable.

Then all at once they're both nearly forty and Richie is still making people laugh and Eddie is still driving too fast and Richie is still in love and then out of nowhere Eddie kisses him in a hotel room in stupid, sexy Paris.

In retrospect Richie blames France for everything.

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(The first time they have sex goes something like this:

They hadn't seen each other for nearly three months because of their equally complicated work schedules so when Eddie had invited him on a last-minute trip to Paris to watch him race, Richie had jumped at the chance. Richie had stumbled off the flight and held on for a respectable amount of time during the hug hello. They had seen the Eiffel tower. They had seen Disneyland and eaten crepes. And it had all been nice, it had all been fucking great until suddenly the race was the next day and then Richie's life had quietly imploded.

Eddie had gone to bed early like he always did the night before a big race and so Richie had been killing time alone in his room, watching episodes of The Simpsons in French when the knock had come at the door.

Richie had rolled off the bed, and pulled on a ratty t-shirt and pyjama pants (he liked to watch TV in the nude, it wasn't weird he just liked the feeling of hotel sheets) and he was still hopping around trying to get both legs in when the knock came again, sharp and insistent.

"Coming!" Richie had called out. "Uh, *Un moment, s'il vous plaît.*"

When he had opened the door, Eddie had been standing there, looking terrified.

"Your French is terrible," was all he had said and then he had grabbed Richie by the front of his shirt and jammed their mouths together in the worst best kiss of Richie's life.

It had been almost painful, their teeth knocking together but Richie hadn't stopped to think about it, not when they had been leading up



to this for months now with all the times they had brushed arms or caught each other looking or knocked knees under the table accidentally-on-purpose.

So, it was almost completely wordless what happened next.

They had pulled each other's clothes off with a strange sexual efficiency, hungry for every new piece of bare skin. Eddie had licked at his neck and Richie had grabbed at his ass and all the time they were pulling each other closer, closer, like they could never be close enough. Richie had sunk down onto his knees right there with the industrial carpet rubbing against his skin and held Eddie's hips in his hands as he sucked him off. Eddie had kept making these noises above him, scrabbling at Richie's shoulders and pawing at his hair like he was dying.

And Richie had thought, he had looked up and thought, *nothing*. Nothing at all.

Richie, who thought nothing through and yet overthought *everything* when it came to Eddie, had felt his brain wiped clean in that moment. He wasn't thinking about why this was happening, or why it had taken so long or even if it was a good idea.

He had felt like he did when he took the first drag of a cigarette or stepping out onstage onto the spotlight; it had felt like letting go and reaching out, all at once. It had felt like sex in it's purest form; undiluted and dangerous, sex like Richie had never had before, the type of sex he had half-suspected didn't really exist outside of TV or steamy novels.

By the time Eddie had come Richie had been so hard it had almost hurt, reaching into his sweatpants to finish himself off. Eddie hadn't let him though, tugging him up almost roughly into a kiss and then two of them had staggered backwards onto the bed, clutching at each other as if carrying out some strange, clumsy dance.

Richie had fallen back onto the sheets and immediately had the air knocked out of him when Eddie had fallen on top of him.

"Sorry, fuck." Eddie had said. "Did I hurt you?"

"I forgive you." Richie had gasped. "But please, for the love of God touch my dick or I'm gonna die."

"Melodramatic." Eddie had said, grinning but then he had reached down with his clever, clever hands and Richie had let out a groan of relief.

"Rich, I need to tell you. I... I've felt....-" Eddie had said, looking down at him with dark eyes and Richie had been too focused on what was happening to his body he had barely heard.

"I know, this is so sexy, I've wanted to do this with you for so long, man, you have no idea," he had said and Eddie had just shut his mouth and nodded tightly, like he was biting something back.

Richie hadn't lingered on it though, not when he was getting the most insane handjob of his life. He could barely see past the stars in

his eyes, twisting around on the hotel sheets, his hands grasping at Eddie's waist and legs and face, because it was all so much, a fucking buffet laid out for him; a fifty-course feast after all the famine.

Afterwards when they were both lying there, Richie panting at the ceiling and trying desperately to make sense of it all, Eddie had smiled at him and said "Sorry if that was weird. I didn't mean to jump you; I just get so fucking keyed up the night before getting out on the track. Was that weird?"

He had looked over, anxious and Richie had realized a lot of things at once.

Mostly that this wasn't *I love you and I pine for you and need you desperately Richie sex*. Or even *Let's be boyfriends! Sex*. That maybe it was more like, *We're obviously both down to pound so what the fuck sex* or maybe even, *I need something to take my mind off a 12 hour race tomorrow and your dick just happens to be in the vicinity sex*.

Mostly what Richie had realized in that moment was that he was okay with that, with any of those options, just as long as he got to do this again.

And so, still shaking from the orgasm, he had just said, "Anytime Eddie-Baby. If you need to get off to stop feeling anxious then just call my dick Valium and hop on."

Eddie had just swatted his leg and laughed and that had pretty much set the tone for the next shiny three-year chapter of their friendship.

And then three months ago Eddie had lost control coming around a corner at just over 80 miles an hour and flipped twice before slamming into the track edge. It hadn't been that bad really and Eddie had crawled out with just a scraped-up knee and a shallow cut over his collarbone, but Richie had been there when it happened, watching from the side. Sometimes, when he closes his eyes, he can still see it, the way the car had turned in mid-air, like a rotisserie fucking chicken and then the few endless moments it had taken before Eddie had popped up into view, with his thumbs up, grinning.

Richie had watched it happen and then he had driven Eddie home and told him he didn't want to keep fucking around anymore.

His exact words were, *I want us to be friends again. I think it was easier like that.*

Eddie hadn't said anything for a long moment, jaw twitching and staring out of the passenger window at the street outside. He still smelt of exhaust smoke.

*Okay.* He had said in the end. *If that's what you want. Maybe you're right.*

Richie had just sat there, looking at him, opening and closing his mouth around all the things he wanted to say. But, in the end, he hadn't said anything at all, just watched Eddie get out of the car and walk away. )

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Tonight, still guilty from lying to Beverly over brunch, Richie does his usual set for the crowd down at the Comedy Store on Sunset Boulevard. It goes fine and the crowd is good, even though it feels like he could be reading off a script. Afterwards he drives home listening to a podcast about killer whales.

Richie wishes he was a killer whale, chewing up seals for dinner and swimming around, bumping up against ice caps. Richie thinks it would be pretty fucking calming, diving down into the dark cold water and not having to think about feelings ever again.

When he lets himself into the apartment the lights are already on and someone is shuffling around in the kitchen. Part of Richie really hopes it's a home invader but he's not that lucky; it's Eddie, rooting around in his fridge.

"Why do you have so much beer and not a single vegetable?" Eddie asks, without looking around. "Oh, shit, how old is this Chinese food? God, you're such a stereotype. You know food goes off even in the fridge right?"

"Oh please, make yourself at home." Richie says dryly, leaning against the doorway. "*Mi case e su casa.*"

He lets himself look, even though he shouldn't really. It's a hot night in L.A but Eddie is still wearing a fucking button up, like he's just rolled out of the office and not a fucking garage. He's turned away but Richie can still see the light of the fridge on his cheekbones, his

stupid smooth hair with all the product in it that Richie used to get his hands caught in.

“You want one?” Eddie asks, slim fingers wrapping around a glass bottle and Richie swallows hard and looks away.

“You’re offering me my own beer? Out of my own fridge? How generous.”

“Just me then. “Eddie says curtly, closing the fridge door with a snap and leaning back against it.

“Not to be rude, *Eduardo*.” Richie says, rudely. “But what are you doing in my kitchen at-“

He glances at his watch and raises his eyebrows. “1AM, Jesus. Isn’t this past your bedtime?”

“I wouldn’t be here if you would *pick up the phone*.” Eddie says and then, like he can’t hold back anymore. “Why are you avoiding me?”

Oh, so they’re just gonna get straight into it then. Richie almost feels more comfortable like this, squaring up for the boxing match just like the old days.

“I’m not avoiding you.” He says, staring hard somewhere in the direction of the cooker. “I’m busy.”

“Yeah, I’m busy, you’re busy, we’re all fucking busy.” Eddie snaps. “I had to hear from Mike about how you beat up reporters now, apparently? *Mike*. Do you know how embarrassing that was? Mike barely uses the internet. He still has a phone book, Richie.”

Richie winces. If Mike (who’s allergic to social media and still sends birthday cards by post) has heard about Richie’s street meltdown then the story is more out of control than he thought.

“It looked worse than it was. I was having a bad day.”

“What’s going on?” Eddie asks, and then a weird expression passes over his face, raw and almost vulnerable. “I thought- I thought you still wanted to be friends at least. Was I- was that wrong?”

Richie swallows hard. “No. *No*, fuck, I mean, of course not Eds. We’re always gonna be friends.”

“So why are you dodging my calls? Why aren’t you telling me what happened?”

“Because-“Richie starts and then groans, putting his head in his hands. “Oh god, I’m just gonna say it okay, don’t have an aneurysm please. This guy, the guy in in the videos I was talking to- he had photos okay? Incriminating photos.”

“Of what?” Eddie asks, blinking and then Richie, peeking between his fingers, sees the realization dawn.

“Oh fuck.” Eddie says hollowly. “Photos of you? Like...gay shit? Did you get caught at a club?”

“What fucking club?” Richie asks incredulously. “Look at me, you think I go clubbing? No, like photos of you. And me. You and me photos. *Us* photos.”

“Us...doing things?” Eddie asks slowly, his big dark eyes somehow getting bigger.

“Yeah. *Things*.” Richie says miserably. “He’s got a whole camera full of things. It’s fucked up.”

“Fucking *asshole*. So, he just stopped you in the street and showed you that? When did he take them? What does he want, to run a story on it? What a douchebag.”

Eddie is pacing now, up and down the kitchen tiles, chewing at his lip. Richie watches him, feeling strangely calmer now Eddie is the one freaking out.

“Not a story. He wants money.”

“What?” Eddie says, wheeling and a little beer splashes out of the



bottle. “He’s fucking *blackmailing* you? That’s...that’s such a dick move. No, actually, that’s fucking *illegal*. What’s his name? Do you know who he writes for? Did he send you any threats in writing? Did you take screenshots?”

“Woah there legal eagle.” Richie says, putting his hands up in the face of Eddie’s scowl. “All I know is his face and a P.O box.”

“Asshole.” Eddie mutters again, and then he looks down at his beer, eyebrows scrunched down low on his face. “How much is he asking for?”

Richie tells him and Eddie’s eyebrows shoot right back up again.

“Holy shit.”

“Yeah.” Richie says and then he opens up the fridge to grab a beer of his own.

“You don’t make that much.” Eddie points out.

“Yeah.”

“I don’t make that much.”

“Like I’m gonna make you pay for my fuck up.” Richie says and winces, because he’s not sure if he’s just talking about the blackmail.

“I mean, we both got caught right? Unless you took like, a secret sex tape or something without me knowing.”

“No!” Richie says and almost spits beer out of his mouth. “God, no. I wouldn’t do that. Ugh.”

“You don’t have to look so disgusted.” Eddie snaps and he’s not really joking, Richie can hear it in the edge of his voice.

Richie wants to argue with him, say, *I would fucking love to have a sex tape if you let me, I would get a fucking blu-ray DVD of that shit playing 24/7 in the background* but that would be insane to voice out loud and also would send a pretty mixed message about Richie’s no sex stance.

But he lets Eddie words hang a little too long in the air and then Eddie’s looking away, shrinking in on himself. Richie has to clench his hands around the bottle to stop himself from reaching out.

“It’s okay, I’ll sort it out.” He says, trying to sound comforting. “I’m like a turtle- I always land on my feet.”

“You’re thinking of cats.” Eddie says flatly. “Turtles famously *don’t* land on their feet- they get stuck on their backs and die. Because they’re too fucking stubborn to accept help.”

Richie makes a sceptical face because he's not sure that's a fair character trait to apply to a turtle.

"Whatever Steve Irwin, the point it's not a problem."

"You mean it's not *my* problem, right? Well news flash, idiot, if I'm in the photos then it is. I'm not *asking* you to accept my help. Both our jobs could be fucked up by this."

"Oh is that what this is? Protecting your career?" Richie says and there's really no reason to be mean but he's tired and rubbed raw by seeing Eddie again, so close and untouchable. "Here I was thinking this was a friendly visit."

Eddie takes a breath that's a little shaky and looks up at him, eyes big and dark.

"That too. We're always gonna be friends. That's what you said right?"

Richie can only nod because yeah, that's true, and he never wants to lose that. Not for anything, and not because Richie can't keep his dick in his pants or his heart out of the gutter.

He clears his throat. "So, uh. What do we do then? What's the plan? Do we know any hackers?"

“Hackers?” Eddie scoffs and then pauses for a long time, thinking furiously. “Fuck, I don’t know. I hadn’t really gotten this far in my head. I’ll text you okay?”

“What, that’s it? That’s the plan? You’ll text?” Richie says a little wildly, and it’s not like he had expected Eddie to swoop in and be his knight in shining armour but he was already getting kind of excited by the idea of them working together to take down this creep, like the Hardy boys or Starsky and Hutch or something. Admittedly with more sexual tension.

At least there would be tension on Richie’s side. Fuck, for all he knows Eddie’s already over it and moved on to someone less emotionally needy by now. Probably with a lower hairline.

The thought leaves him sad and distracted long after Eddie’s gone, and the apartment has returned to its normal too-empty stillness. The only sign that he’s been there at all is the half empty bottle on the kitchen counter. Richie finishes it off for him, along with his own and then goes to jerk off while trying hard to think about nothing, nothing at all.

In retrospect things had all been fucked from the minute he had given Eddie the key to his apartment.

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(That had been around the tenth or eleventh time they had hooked up, back when they had been really getting good at it.

When Richie had used to imagine sex with Eddie, and he had on a near daily basis for years, he had for some reason pictured him as shy, almost hesitant. In his fantasies Richie always had to make the first move and Eddie would lie there, trembling on the sheet and waiting for Richie to touch him. In reality sex with Eddie was more like trying to wrestle an incredibly impatient octopus or getting hit by a particularly sexy train.

Eddie seemed to want to everything at once and when it came to what he wanted, he could incredibly bossy. He would talk all the time; he could never shut up and most of it was instructions. It didn't help that he changed his mind almost constantly. He would abandon blow jobs midway through in favour of getting Richie's shirt off; go from dirty talk to forehead kissing in seconds flat if the mood suddenly took him.

Once completely unprompted, in the middle of making out, Eddie had sat up and started telling Richie very seriously about a mole he had noticed on his back in the shower that morning. It wasn't until after he had made Richie take a picture of it and talk him down from using WebMD that the sex had continued.

Not that Richie is complaining; in a fucked-up kind of way it was even sexier, the utterly unpredictable nature of whatever happened between them behind closed doors. Richie never knew *when* it would happen either; could never predict the moments when Eddie would suddenly decide he desperately needed to get his hands-on Richie's dick. Sometimes he would drop by at night and they would fuck; and other times they would order takeaway and watch TV with their legs all tangled up on the couch between them.

Eddie never stayed over on those nights; the sexless ones, and Richie never asked him to. Whatever delicate balance they maintained between them worked on the basis of these invisible lines in the sand.

The night that Richie gave Eddie the key to his apartment was incidentally also the night Eddie decided he wanted to get fucked for the first time.

“Let’s go. I’m ready. Go nuts.” Eddie had told him briskly, already half out of his shirt five minutes after walking in the door.

Richie had just stood there, blinking like a fucking idiot at the condom packet that had been pressed into his hand.

“Tonight?” He had asked and then winced at the way there had been a little squeak there at the end. “Are you one hundred percent on this?”

“Yeah.” Eddie had said, the *duh* unsaid but heavily implied. “I’m tested, I made you get tested. I’ve been researching this for like two weeks and I prepared before I came over. Let’s do it.”

“Why do I feel like the only one who hasn’t studied for the pop quiz?” Richie asked but he couldn’t resist coming closer when Eddie took his shirt off, like a horny moth to a flame. He dropped the condom on the bed in favour of smoothing his hands down Eddie’s arms.

Eddie had leant up to kiss, his teeth just barely there on Richie's lower lip, and when he pulled away, he had been smiling.

"You don't need to revise- you don't even need a cheat sheet. I've got this all planned out." He had said in a low voice. "Just think of me as your study buddy."

Richie had shivered a little, despite himself and let himself be drawn down onto the bed, his shirt and pants stripped away in record time. They were better at undressing each other by this point; or at least Richie was better at undoing all of Eddie's stupid polo shirt buttons and Eddie had stopped trying to fold shit as they went along.

"I mean, it's not like I haven't thought about doing this." Richie had said, tracing little circles onto Eddie's thigh and looking down at him. "It's just, I mean, are you sure? Really, really sure?"

"Richie." Eddie had said warningly, and Richie had taken a deep breath and nodded to ward off the lecture about 'who knows what's best for who'.

Instead of going down that road, he ducks down to kiss the inside of Eddie's knee, where it was warm and soft and then up his inner thigh.

"Fuck, I don't need foreplay." Eddie had growled but Richie could tell he liked it from the way his muscles were twitching under Richie's hand and the redness creeping up his throat and over his cheekbones.

“It’s not all about you, asshole.” Richie had chided and taken the time to suck a hickey into the softer skin midway up Eddie’s thigh, a tiny little mark that might stick around for a day or two. Maybe Eddie would see it in the shower tomorrow morning and remember this, and the thought made Richie suddenly impatient to fuck him.

When he had reached up and brushed over the tight ring of muscle with one finger he had looked up in shock, swearing low under his breath.

“When you said you had prepared...” He started and Eddie had flushed, eyes skittering away across the room.

“I told you I was ready.”

“Yeah but I didn’t think...” Richie had started and then watched, fascinated as two fingers slid in with barely any resistance. “Oh fuck Eds, this is so hot, what the *fuck*.”

“Keep going.” Eddie had gasped, wiggling a little now and Richie happily obliged, first two fingers, then three, watching Eddie taking them greedily and thanking every deity out there he had kept his glasses on because this, this was a fucking show, this was classy downtown burlesque act and late night pay-per-view porn all rolled into one.

“So, uh, you did this before coming over?” He had asked, hearing how rough his voice was even through the haze. “You did this to



yourself?”

“Y-Yeah.” Eddie muttered, on hand over his face and twitching every time Richie twisted his fingers.

“Was it good?” Richie had asked, unable to stop himself. “Did it feel like this? Did you think about me doing it to you?”

“No. It didn’t feel like this. This is so much better Richie, *fuck*.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.” Richie said and then he was taking Eddie’s hand from where it covered his face, kissing at the inside of his wrist and guiding it down. “Keep going, I want you to show me what it was like. What you looked like.”

“I have to do everything around here.” Eddie had said, but his voice had been shaking, and Richie had fumbled on the condom, nearly breaking it three times because all he could focus on was the way Eddie’s fingers were moving between his legs, fucking himself in short sharp little spasms.

“Jesus. Jesus.” Richie said, touching himself while he watched but only lightly because he was so close now, just from this.

“Fuck me already.” Eddie had snapped, watching him right back and Richie had pressed him hard into the mattress saying, “So fucking bossy. How about you let me be in charge for once, yeah? Spread your legs for me, can you do that Eds?”

“I thought you’d never ask.” Eddie said, grinning at him sharp and sweet like this reaction is what he was pushing for all along.

Richie had kissed him then, almost harshly, and kept kissing him until he was working himself deep inside and Eddie was moaning against his mouth and then Richie had slowed down, eased back a little. Eddie had gasped and twitched around him, scrabbling until his hand had grasped tightly around Richie’s, sweaty and too warm. Richie had held it tightly and felt suddenly overwhelmed with something almost like sadness, like it was all too much and for a moment he had just panted hard into Eddie’s neck and tried to control himself.

When he finally pulled himself together, Eddie was begging at him to move and so he had, fucking him at first unevenly and still hesitant and then between them they had found an angle that worked.

“Oh God, oh fuck, Richie.” Eddie said, one hand on Richie’s chest, the other pawing at his hip, trying to draw him closer. “This is so much better than I thought it would be.”

“You thought about this?” Richie had gasped out, and then he almost stopped, frowning. “Wait, you thought I would be bad at this?”

“No I just, *fuck*, after other people I thought it was overrated.” Eddie had said, eyes shut now, all dark lashes and red cheeks. “It was never like this before.”

It should have been a turn-off thinking about other people seeing Eddie like this-other people *doing this* to Eddie but instead it just makes Richie move harder, faster, thinking, *Yeah, Screw everyone else, all those losers didn't know you, it's only me who can do this to you, Eddie, only me, you don't need anyone else-*

He had bitten his tongue so hard to stop himself from saying the words out loud that he had tasted blood and the minute he felt Eddie call out his name he had been gone, over the cliff edge and still holding on to Eddie's hand for dear life.

Once they had done that for real, jumping into the quarry together and now they were screwing around in Richie's grown up apartment with all their grown-up clothes and grown up issues scattered all over the floor; it still felt the same. It always did with Eddie.

"I have a spare key." He had said, sometime after that, shouting it through the bathroom door while Eddie was still in the shower. Part of him was hoping that Eddie wouldn't hear and Richie could pretend he had said no, turned it down flat.

But instead, Eddie had cracked open the door, letting out a cloud of steam and said, "Yeah I know, you keep it in the flower pot. We all know that Richie. Ben used it last week to try and rescue your stupid dead houseplant."

"What if." Richie had said, very carefully. "What if it was your key? To the apartment? Would that be cool?"

Eddie had looked at him for a long moment and then nodded. "Okay.

But it stays in the flowerpot right? Because Beverly will kill me if she can't find it."

"Yeah obviously." Richie had said, rolling her eyes. "You think that plant would last a week without Ben?"

Maybe the mistake hadn't been in giving Eddie the spare key; maybe the mistake was that it wasn't big gesture when Eddie had been using it for years before that night. It was hard, to find some way of telling Eddie how he felt, when every gesture could be mixed up and lost in the general affection of their friendship.

But that wasn't quite true; he didn't treat Eddie like the others, not entirely.

Richie loved his friends deeply and told them that whenever he remembered. He signed his postcards to Mike with an xxx. He asked Stan to marry him whenever Stan paid for lunch. He had said *I love you* to Ben and Beverly and Bill so many times he didn't even think about it now, but he had never, *ever* said it to Eddie.

In a way that was his own private confession. )

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He's so busy feeling sorry for himself the next day, watching old horror films on the sci fi channel in his sweatpants that he almost misses Eddie's text.

*I'm picking you up at seven. Wear something nice. It reads and then a second later in all caps: NO HAWAIIIN SHIRTS.*

Richie looks at the little glowing screen for a long time, before carefully picking out the most neutral smiley face he can.

He feels pretty happy with the result. That's a friend smiley face. That's a 'I don't even want to fuck you anymore' smiley face. He almost screws up by adding an x but he manages to catch himself at the last minute.

Richie can do this. He's great at this.

When he walks outside that evening into the warm L.A air, Eddie is leaning against the hood of his Prius. He looks unfairly good, in a loose white shirt and jeans that fit just a little too well and he's wearing shades that he removes dramatically to glare at Richie's outfit.

"I said nice douchebag. Not, *a tie dye cat threw up on me.*"

"Hey, all you said was not Hawaiian." Richie objects. "You're lucky I changed out of my sweatpants."

“Ugh.” Eddie says with feeling, going around to climb into the car. “*You’re lucky* we’re not going anywhere that makes you wear a suit.”

Richie folds himself into the passenger’s seat and rolls down his window to feel the breeze.

“Speaking of that, where *are* we going anyway? Not that I don’t appreciate being abducted.”

“We’re going...” Eddie says and he looks grimly determined, almost gritting his teeth “On a date.”

Richie’s head whips round to look at him and he’s pretty sure his mouth drops open.

“Um.” Is all he can manage, his heart suddenly tapping out a samba in his chest. “What’s that now?”

“You heard me.” Eddie says, looking straight ahead out of the window. “Don’t worry it’s not a real one. I was thinking we need to draw this guy out right? He’ll be watching us- maybe he won’t be able to resist getting a little more dirt. Then when we see him, BAM.”

“We...We kill him?” Richie asks.

“No, asshole. We catch him blackmailing us on tape.” Eddie says and then twitches open his jacket so Richie can see a dinky little recorder in the inner pocket.

“Wow, impressive set up, James Bond.” Richie says, whistling. “But how is he supposed to know we’re gonna be staging this little honey trap tonight? I mean, he can’t be watching me all the time, right?”

He glances over his shoulder, suddenly paranoid. The street is almost empty, bathed in warm evening light, but in L.A you’re never truly alone.

“Simple.” Eddie says. “Twitter.”

After a lot of bickering the tweet exchange goes something like this:

*TrashmouthTozier: Hey @EddieKaspbrak you know how you love 2 cry at titanic? did u know there's a theme restaurant in koreatown called Café Jack. with KARAOKE?*

*EddieKaspbrak: I'm not singing My Heart Will Go On With You.*

*TrashmouthTozier: It's on an actual BOAT.*

*EddieKaspbrak: I know I'll regret this but I'm free tonight. Pick u up in half an hour? I'll drive.*

*TrashmouthTozier: yeah u will B)*

“Is it too flirty?” Eddie asks, when it’s already tweeted out and it’s too late to change it.

“That’s how we always tweet.” Richie says and Eddie gives him a weird look.

“Yeah. Yeah I guess that’s true.” Eddie says. “Buckle up.”

“God, you’re such a responsible driver.” Richie tells him, with disgust. “I still can’t believe you drive a Prius. I can’t believe your sponsors *let you* drive a Prius.”

“They’re good for the environment. And I don’t need to drive fast off the racetrack.”

Richie feels his mouth twist up a little bit, like it always does when they get to talking about Eddie’s career. It’s admittedly very cool and undeniably sexy, the way Eddie can handle going 200 miles an hour without breaking a sweat and yeah, Richie appreciates the way his ass looks in the jumpsuit but there’s no getting around the fact that Eddie takes his life in his hands every time he gets behind the wheel.

It was weird how fucking paranoid about health and safety Eddie was 99 percent of the time; refusing to use public bathrooms and asking for his steaks well done in every restaurant, and then somehow doing the job he did, and doing it fucking *well*.



The closest Richie had come to understanding it was when Eddie had told him it was like a switch in his head, the way he felt nudging the car over 80, like everything else just faded away.

Eddie was a good driver; a fucking excellent driver but that didn't make it any easier to watch him race. The sex had made that worse somehow. The barriers that Richie had built up between them were weaker when they slept side by side at night, fragile and almost not there at all.

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(Sometimes Richie suspects Eddie only became a driver because it turned him on a little bit.

He had never said this theory out loud to anyone, mostly because he's pretty sure Eddie would murder him on the spot, but the evidence was there.

Richie could always tell the days when Eddie had been racing, even without checking his news feed; on those nights he would turn up on Richie's doorstep without fail and always stay the night. When he wasn't close enough to do that, he would call Richie up and the two of them would talk in circles until they started talking dirty. Either way it would end in orgasms.

It wasn't just the thrill of winning or even competing; Richie had been pulled into enough backseats to associate the smell of car engines with sex.

“It’s like the guy with the dogs.” He had told Eddie once while they were alone at night in an empty garage down at the Speedway. “The bell and food guy.”

“Pavlov?” Eddie had asked, leaning back against the hood of the car he was looking at, rubbing the grease off his hands. “Are you trying to say your dick has a Pavlovian response to motor oil?”

“Not like, the oil itself. It’s not like I want to use it for lube or something.” Richie had said, stepping a little closer so that Eddie would have to look up at him. “It’s just the smell.”

“That’s good because I would *never* let that happen.”

“Yeah you would.” Richie had said, grinning down and rubbing a spot of grease off Eddie’s cheekbone. “If I asked you nicely.”

“You know they have cameras in here.” Eddie had warned but Richie could see him shifting, his eyes getting a little darker.

Eddie’s work used to take him all over; from Sebring to Europe and there had been *years* where Richie had only seen him on odd weekends every six months. That had been rough, waiting up for their time zones to align enough for long tinny phone calls and it had been a huge fucking relief when Eddie had taken up a permanent job down in Fontana. It had been a step down in terms of pay and a lot less prestigious, doing ride-alongs for rich speed freaks but Eddie had said he preferred it in a way. He still competed but that was the side

gig now and most of his time he was in California, long enough to have bought a place of his own now in the Northside.

*Settled*, was the word Eddie had used, and Richie couldn't have been happier because Fontana was only an hour's drive from L.A.

Sometimes, he had secretly wondered if maybe that was a part of why Eddie had chosen the job. But even then, it wouldn't have just been for Richie; Beverly's company was L.A based, and Bill was always flying out to Hollywood to oversee projects. Whenever they all met up, and they were doing that a lot more often these days, Stan and Mike would fly in from New York. It was just easier that way.

There were a lot of reasons to be in California and Richie's wouldn't kid himself into thinking access to his middle-aged body and dubious sense of humour was at the top of the list.

"I do know a blind spot. Camera wise." Eddie had told him that night in the garage and hey, maybe he hadn't minded how middle-aged Richie's body was after all, judging by the hungry way he was looking at it.

"Tell me more. How blind are we talking? As a bat or just a little shortsighted?" Richie said, hanging back even though his hands had been itching to push Eddie's shirt up over his stomach.

Eddie had just grinned, hopped up from the hood and opened the door of the car.

“I still have the gearstick bruises from the last time we tried this.” Richie had complained but clambered in anyway because it was still stupid sexy after all this time, the idea of Eddie all greasy and messy and *his*, at least for the night.

“Are you sure this is out of sight?” Richie had gasped when Eddie had two hands down the front of his pants and his teeth at Richie’s neck.

“Jesus, yes, don’t worry so much.” Eddie had muttered. “Who cares if they see anyway? Don’t you think that’s kind of hot, having people see us like this, *doing* this? Sometimes I get so hard just thinking about it, the thought of everyone seeing.”

Richie had laughed at how serious he had sounded in that moment, saying “You say the weirdest shit when you’re turned on. It’s like you’re possessed by a sex demon or something.”

“Fuck off.” Eddie had said and for a moment Richie had almost detected an edge of real hurt in his voice but then Eddie had ducked down to take Richie’s dick in his mouth and Richie couldn’t see his face anymore.

Eddie had been rougher than usual that night, his fingers digging into Richie’s hips, taking his dick almost aggressively, barely coming up for air. It had been hot but also kind of strange and Richie had found it hard to push what Eddie had said out of his head, about how it would be to be seen like this, to have other people know.

Richie thought about it sure, but his fantasies were less about the

sexual thrill of voyeurism and more about stupid shit, like being caught holding hands by Beverly or Ben as they walked down the street. That was something he thought about a lot actually, almost obsessively but it would never happen because they never held hands. Not outside of a bed at least.

But it was nice, the idea of being caught in a moment of affection by people he trusted; as if having someone else bear witness would make it real somehow.

Then Eddie had made a cut off sort of moan around Richie's dick and looked up at him and Richie had forgotten all about his stupid hand-holding fantasy. He had buried his hand in Eddie's hair and tried not to thrust up into the warm, wet heat of his mouth.

When Eddie looked up at him like that it was hard to remember any fantasies at all, because this was already so hard to believe was actually happening; all his teenage daydreams fulfilled in the form of Eddie sucking his dick in a car backseat.

Almost all of his teenage daydreams at least, because while Richie had been a horny adolescent he had also, secretly been a very lovesick one. Not much had changed since then.)

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“Holy shit you weren’t joking, this *is* a fucking boat.” Eddie says wide eyed when they wander up to the restaurant. “Is this- is this even safe?”

“Do you see any icebergs?”

“Remind me why we’re here instead of somewhere normal, in an actual building?”

“It’s distinctive. If we’re being followed, he’ll know where to find us.” Richie says and smiles at the waitress when she greets them at the door. “This place is cool anyway. You know they do tarot readings in the back?”

“How do you find these places?” Eddie hisses as they follow their waitress to a semi-private little cabin at the back.

It’s decorated with an out of season plastic Christmas tree, a Curious George poster and a signed photo of a floppy haired Leonardo di Caprio. The restaurant doesn’t seem particularly dedicated to any theme beyond high kitsch but the food when it comes, is pretty good, even if Eddie frets over the seafood.

“Did you know that most of the fish served in L.A is mildly radioactive?” Eddie asks, poking at his tuna roll.

“Mildly though.” Richie says with his mouth full. “Mildly is fine by me.”

“Hmm.” Eddie says doubtfully and then leans forward over the table. “Hey, do something couple-ey. Kick my foot.”

Richie nearly chokes on his gyoza. “Right here?”

“No, up on the deck with the wind in our hair.” Eddie says sarcastically. “C’mon we need to make this look like a real date. We go out for food all the time.”

Richie scrubs a hand through his hair, feeling weirdly trapped.

“Is kicking romantic? I mean, I know you probably think it is-“

“Fine, not kicking. Hold my hand then.” Eddie says impatiently. “Try not to look so frightened.”

Richie looks down at Eddie’s hand lying on the wooden table and it seems very far away, like he’s looking at it on television. He takes it before he can talk himself out of it and when Eddie interlocks their fingers Richie thinks he might pass out.

Sucking Eddie’s dick had felt less intimate than this, and Richie shouldn’t have thought about that because now he’s rocking a semi right here in the middle of the restaurant and *fuck, he’s pathetic.*

“How’s that?” He asks, strangled and Eddie swallows and nods.

“Yeah it’s uh. Good. Kind of sweaty.”

“Should I stop?”

“No.” Eddie says quickly, looking away. “No, you can keep going.”

It’s really awkward eating one handed but Richie doesn’t really want to let go and when they finish up and leave it’s somehow natural to reach for Eddie’s hand again in the street, hold it as they walk down the pavement together. They’re having a familiar argument about whether or not Batman would be a republican and Eddie’s reaching peak arm waving velocity. All Richie can think is that this feels so normal, even though it’s just for show.

They had spent so long trying to hide this thing between them that it feels strange to act it out now for some unseen camera. Like a fucked-up parody of what they had once been to each other.

“Any sign of him?” Eddie mutters into his ear, under the guise of reaching up to adjust Richie’s glasses. Half of his face is splashed in red from an overhanging neon sign and then without thinking about it, Richie leans down and kisses him, right there in the street.

Eddie doesn’t lean into it like he used to; instead he stiffens up and pulls back, looking hurt.



“Was that, uh, a yes?” He asks and Richie knows he’s saying, *Was that for show?*

“No.” Richie says quickly. “I didn’t see anything. I just wanted to.”

Eddie looks at him for a long moment, eyes narrowed and then he’s dropping his hand, and stepping back.

“Why do you do things like that?” Eddie asks him, looking almost lost. “I don’t get it Richie, I really fucking don’t.”

Then he turns and walks away, and Richie is left, blinking after his back and wondering at what point he’d crossed the line.

“Eddie?” Richie calls after him and then he’s pushing through the crowd to keep up with Eddie as he walks away. “Eds, what the fuck? I thought you wanted couple-ey?”

“I guess I did.” Eddie says, biting the words out. “I guess I did want that.”

“So why are you pissed at me?” Richie snaps, getting angry too now. “You’re the one who planned this whole stupid thing! Jesus, I never know what you want, you’re so fucking-“

“I’m what Richie?” Eddie asks, whirling on him and people are giving

them weird looks now. “Sad? Pathetic? Just say it.”

“What the fuck, I don’t think any of those things.” Richie says, taken aback. “Do you- Why would you think that?”

Eddie’s eyes flicker like he’s trying to work out something in his head, and his jaw keeps making little movements but he’s not saying anything, and the moment drags on, endless.

Finally, he looks away and says in a small, clipped voice, “Let’s just get back to the car. I’ll drive you home.”

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(The last time they had sex, Richie didn’t know it was the last time.

It hadn’t been planned; they had been hanging out with Bill backstage after Richie’s show, drinking at the bar and trying to get Bill to stop worrying about script edits. When Bill had staggered off to go to the bathroom Eddie had leaned over the table, tracing one hand around the rim of his glass and his toe nudging at Richie’s ankle.

“Want to come back to my place after this?” Eddie had asked in a low voice and Richie had looked around to check no one was watching before letting their legs brush a little closer.

“Aren’t you going to ask what a nice guy like me is doing in a place like this?” He had said, already feeling the anticipation curling deep in his stomach.

“You’re not a nice guy.” Eddie had said, eyes creasing up a little when he grinned and then over his shoulder Richie had seen Bill coming back and straightened up quickly, pulling away his leg.

Eddie had been in a weird mood after that, even after Bill had left and had been nearly silent in the uber on the way over to his place. Richie had felt off-kilter, on edge and anxious to touch him, to reassure himself with the feel of Eddie’s mouth under his. But he couldn’t do that in the car, not with the stranger driving up front, so he had just sat there, trying to make stupid jokes about the weather.

When they were inside Eddie’s apartment and finally alone with the door locked Eddie hadn’t seemed to want to talk, hadn’t even waited to turn the lights on before pulling Richie into a kiss.

Richie had let Eddie walk him back against the kitchen counter, let him strip off Richie jacket and slide his knee between Richie’s legs. Then Eddie had tried to take off his own shirt and got caught with his arm at the sleeve, yanking it so hard it had almost ripped a little.

Eddie had cursed at it with real frustration and Richie had almost laughed at him before suddenly realizing that this wasn’t play-acting, that Eddie actually looked *upset*.

“Hey,” Richie had tried to say, reaching out to put a hand on his arm.  
“Hey, it’s just a stupid button.”

“No, it’s broken, I fucking broke it.” Eddie had said, sounding mad at himself and Richie had swallowed, unsure.

“Hey, you know we don’t have to have sex right? If you don’t want to, you just have to say.”

“I do, I do want to.” Eddie had said stubbornly and then let out a heavy breath. “I’m just, fuck, I don’t know, stressed, I guess. It’s my first drive with the new model tomorrow.”

“Fuck, really? Shouldn’t you be getting an early night then? Wait, should you have been drinking?”

“I’m not going to crash and burn after two beers the night before.” Eddie had grouched. “If I do you can say I told you so though.”

Richie had felt the pressure to laugh that off, say something snarky back, but he couldn’t quite manage it, not when he could picture it so clearly in his head, the twisted metal and pillar of smoke.

Eddie must have seen it on his face because his expression had softened a little and he leaned forward to kiss him more softly, one hand on Richie’s face.

“You know I-, “Richie had started and then cut himself off and tried again. “I do worry. Sometimes. About you.”

It wasn't half of what he could have said but it had sounded too sincere, too open and Richie had panicked, watching the slightly startled expression on Eddie's face.

This was why he tried to avoid moments like this, keep it all easy breezy, lemon squeezy between them. Because part of Richie knew that if he let go just a little then it would all come out, all the piled-up years of dirty emotional laundry. If Eddie knew the truth of it, the horrible depth and intensity of Richie's dirty little secret then this nice little, no strings arrangement would be officially Fucked. Capital F.

“I mean, what if your dick gets all mangled up?” He had said, to cover and then winced at himself, thinking, *you fucking coward Tozier*.

Eddie makes a face at him but doesn't step away, just leant up on his toes to kiss him. A little after that he had taken Richie to bed and fucked him open on the covers of his neatly made bed.

Richie had clutched at the bedsheets, feeling unhinged, desperate, using just about every swearword he knew, but Eddie had been weirdly quiet through it all, making these tightly controlled little gasps and hiding his face in Richie's bare chest.

“Eddie, Eddie, Eds.” Richie had said, when it was so good, he had lost all control, desperate to come but never wanting it to end. “Look at me Eddie please.”

“I’m looking.” Eddie had said, locking eyes with him almost desperately. “I’m looking at you, I’m here.”

“Yeah, you are. You’re right here.” Richie told him and it was nonsense, it was stupid sex babble but also it wasn’t, it was a code that Richie couldn’t quite crack, a message he felt unable to either send or receive.

In the end it was a hookup, like every other hookup, and the next morning Richie had driven over with Eddie to the track and then watched the car crash happen in slow motion in front of him, and all he could think was, *I told you so, Oh God, I told you so and please don’t be dead, please Eddie, please.* )

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On the way back, Richie keeps looking over at Eddie’s face, illuminated in the flashes of streetlights, trying to think of something to say. The space between them feels vast and messy, and filled with hidden icebergs that either of them might crash up against at any moment.

But hell, Richie’s always felt a weird affinity for the Titanic, so as always, he can’t keep his big fucking mouth shut.

"I'm sorry I kissed you." He blurts out. "It was dumb, I wasn't thinking but tonight was okay right, apart from that? You had fun?"

Eddie takes a corner a little too sharply and Richie swears under his breath and grabs at the seatbelt.

"Oh it was fun." Eddie says acidly, in an incredibly un-fun tone. "We always have fun right? You and me are super fun."

"Look, can we just talk about whatever is making you so pissed off? Because I'm not getting these weird hints you keep dropping. We went out, I held your fucking hand, like you asked me to—"

"Oh, thank you so much." Eddie cuts in, rolling his eyes and missing the turn off to Richie's apartment. "So nice of you to do that, I'm really grateful, I know it must have been a huge fucking strain on you—"

"That was pretty fucking nice!" Richie says hotly. "Considering how I feel- how *you know* I feel—"

"How you feel?" Eddie nearly shouts and they're driving way too fast now, screeching around the bend that will take them up to the hills. "*You're* the one that broke up with *me* asshole!"

For a moment Richie just gapes at him and then he says in the smallest of voices, "We were going out?"

“Oh, fuck you.” Eddie spits and then there’s a blare of a horn and headlights coming straight at them.

“Eds!” Richie yells but Eddie is already swearing and yanking at the wheel and the truck barrels past them, horn still screaming into the night.

“Jesus.” Richie says, twisting around in his seat to stare after it. “That was really fucking close. We were nearly road pizza.”

There’s nothing but silence from the driver’s seat and when Richie looks over, Eddie is pale and frozen, staring straight ahead.

“Eds?” Richie asks gently and Eddie lets out a long shaking breath.

“What did you mean when you asked if we were going out?”

“That’s what you want to focus on?” Richie asks, a little wildly. “We just had a fucking *near-death experience*.”

“Richie, what did you think we were *doing* for the last three years?”

“We were friends.” Richie says, blinking at him, not understanding. “Friends with benefits.”

Eddie is silent for a moment and then he let’s out a weird, painful



kind of laugh.

“Was that...was that wrong?” Richie asks, a horrible prospect suddenly dawning on him. “Eddie, what did you think was happening?”

“Were you sleeping with anyone else?” Eddie asks, looking over and when Richie shakes his head numbly, he looks weirdly relieved. “Yeah, me neither.”

“But everything between us was the same.” Richie says through numb lips. “We just had sex. I thought that was the arrangement-*your arrangement.*”

“I moved to fucking California for you.”

“You moved to California for your job.” Richie says weakly and then Eddie starts laughing again, but he doesn’t look happy.

“Oh my god, Beverly was actually right.” Eddie says, almost to himself. “We’re both so fucking stupid.”

“No, wait.” Richie says, trying to somehow make sense of it all. “You never said anything. We never even talked about it.”

“Neither did you! And you didn’t talk either!” Eddie said. “I thought that was just what you were like-that it was just unspoken!”

“But we never went out anywhere! I never held your hand or bought you dinner or-,” Richie breaks off with a groan. “Oh my God Eddie if you thought we were going out...You must have thought I was the world’s shittiest boyfriend.”

“I mean, I never did any of that either. And I thought you didn’t want to go public- for your career.” Eddie says and he’s stopped laughing now and his fingers are clenched around the wheel. “It doesn’t matter anymore I guess.”

“What, because I broke up with you?” Richie asks. “Eddie, I thought we were just fucking around. Wait, wait does this mean you like me? *Like-like* me?”

“I don’t fucking *like-like* you, you dipshit, I’m not twelve; I love you. I’m *in* love with you.” Eddie snaps and then, when he sees Richie’s face. “Why are you smiling? Fucking stop it.”

“I can’t.” Richie tells him. “You love me.”

“Stop saying it.”

“You *love* me. You, Eddie Kaspbrak.”

“I will crash this car off a cliff, Richie I swear to God.”

“You won’t.” Richie says smugly. “You love me too much.”

Eddie opens his mouth to shout and then closes it, glancing over at him.

“Does this- Does this mean you feel the same way? Or is this just, fuck, I don’t know; the meanest joke you’ve ever made?”

“Pull over.” Richie says and then when Eddie does, pulling them into an empty viewpoint, looking out over the city.

It’s huge, and sparkling like a diamond below them, and Richie looks out but doesn’t see it, not really, not with Eddie sitting beside him.

He waits until the engine is off and then into the silence he says, “When I was younger all I ever wanted was to be your friend. That was enough; that was fucking more than enough.”

Eddie opens his mouth like he’s going to object or maybe agree but Richie needs to get this out now he’s started, or he might actually explode.

“Then when we started having sex, I thought that would be enough too, just getting to have that, even if you didn’t love me back.” He carries on in a rush. “I broke it off because I thought it would drive me crazy having all these things and not everything from you Eddie, *but I was wrong*. I’ve been fucking miserable ever since and it’s not because I’m not getting laid anymore or because my heart was

broken, though yeah, it was a little bit. I just missed you.”

Richie takes a deep breath and looks over and Eddie is watching him with huge dark eyes, so quiet that Richie thinks he might be holding his breath.

“I want to be your friend.” Richie says and before Eddie’s face can fall, he keeps going. “I want to be your friend and I want to fuck you and I want to tell you I love you and I want to hold your hand in Titanic-themed restaurants even when it’s kind of sweaty and gross. I want everything Eds. I want all of it. But I’ll take whatever I can get. Whatever you’ll let me have.”

Having said his piece, Richie finally shuts up. The ship has struck the iceberg. The killer whales are circling.

Then Eddie smiles at him, from across the dark car.

“That was a long way of saying I like you too.” Eddie says and then he’s leaning over the gearstick to kiss him, reaching up with both hands to cradle Richie’s face.

“You know why I started racing?” Eddie asks when they pull apart.

“Um,” Richie says, feeling a little bit of whiplash at the change in conversation. “Because you have a thing for car sex?”

“No.” Eddie says and then, considering. “Okay, maybe. But really it was because I wanted to piss off my mom. I needed something like that, to break away from her. And I had two things I could have done; I could have kissed you, back when we were kids. Or I could have driven fast cars. Either would have worked.”

“So what, I’m the backup plan?” Richie asks, pretending to be annoyed but reeling at the idea of Eddie thinking of kissing him, even back then.

“No.” Eddie says quietly. “You were never the backup. I just wasn’t brave enough for you. I would rather have crashed a billion times over than admit how much I wanted to hold your dumb fucking hand.”

“I’m glad you didn’t.” Richie tells him. “I couldn’t even handle one crash.”

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The next morning when Richie wakes up, everything is a fuzzy blur without his glasses. When he fumbles for them on the bedside cabinet and out them on Eddie comes into to focus, lying next to him in bed. The freckles are harder to make out but they’re still there, even after all these years.

Richie thinks about maybe going to make coffee or bringing back breakfast but he doesn’t really have anything in the house, unless Eddie wants to eat tootsie rolls or maybe some cheese slices that are

probably out of date now anyway. Richie thinks about maybe going to the store but he can't bear the thought of Eddie waking up alone and thinking, even for a second, that Richie has chickened out and run away again.

While he's agonising over it, he feels a hand slip under his shirt and when he looks over, Eddie's eyes are open and watching him.

"Morning sunshine." Richie says. "You're still here."

"Disappointed?" Eddie asks, voice rough from sleep.

"No. It's just- "Richie starts and then stumbles a little. "We didn't have sex."

"Yeah."

"And you're still here."

"Yeah." Eddie says again and then smiles with the corners of his eyes all creased up. "So are you."

"Why didn't we ever talk about it?" Richie asks him and then hesitates. "Are we really just dumbasses? *Three fucking years*, Eddie."

Eddie shrugs a little, and the blanket dislodges enough to reveal his bare shoulder, the scar on his collarbone. It's not that old really; still pink.

"I don't know about you, but I thought maybe talking would fuck everything up more." Eddie says. "I thought maybe, I don't know, it might scare you away. Or scare *me* away."

"I don't scare that easy." Richie says and it's only sort of a lie.

Eddie gives him a long look and then rolls over on top of Richie's chest, taking the covers with him. He's wearing Richie's sweatpants, but no shirt and his skin is very warm. Laid out like this, Richie can feel all of him, the heavy reality of his body, the undeniable fact of his closeness. Richie's hands fit almost perfectly on either side of Eddie's waist and when he ducks his head up it's very easy to brush their lips together, feel Eddie's nose bump against his.

"Rich." Eddie says and Richie kisses him a little deeper, because he doesn't need to worry now, about showing his hand or giving the game away.

"Richie." Eddie says again and then makes a frustrated noise in the back of his throat.

"What?" Richie asks. "You want me to brush my teeth?"

"No." Eddie says and then reconsiders. "Well, yes, but I also wanted

to know...While we're talking about it."

"Yeah?"

"Why did you break it off? I mean I know you said last night about the emotional shit but why *then*? After all that time."

Richie frowns a little, wondering if he should be offended by the phrase 'emotional shit'. He decides to let it go in favour of exploring the underside of Eddie's jaw with his mouth.

"I don't know. It just built up I guess." Richie mumbles against his skin, taking the opportunity to slide his fingers just under the waistband of Eddie's borrowed sweatpants.

Eddie squirms against him and pulls back a little bit to look him in the eye. "Was it because of the accident? Look, I'm not trying to be a bitch here but I've spent a lot of time going over what happened that day and-

"Yeah, okay, fine." Richie admits, more roughly than he had meant to. "It was because of the crash. You got me. Can we go back to making out now?"

Eddie gives him a hard stare.

"You want to be my boyfriend? You want this to be a real



relationship?” Eddie asks, raising his eyebrows. “Then we talk about this shit. Okay?”

Richie takes a breath and relents. “Okay.”

“So, what? What was it?”

For the first time in three months, Richie lets himself think about it. The noise of the impact. The smell of smoke and burnt rubber.

“I thought you were dead when the crash happened. I need you to understand how much I was sure you were dead.” He says and it comes out in very simply and quietly after all this time. “It took five minutes to get you out of the car Eddie. “

“Did you think it would be easier to watch me doing dangerous shit if we weren’t fucking?” Eddie asks.

It’s not mean, it’s strangely gentle but it still makes Richie feel like he’s been punched in the gut?

“No. I mean maybe sort of.” He says, trying to think of how to possibly explain it, what he had felt that day. “But really I guess it just made me realize how much I wanted.... How much I-”

He cuts himself off and then Eddie nudges him, smiling a little shyly.

“You can say it now. The words.” Eddie reminds him. “You don’t have to be embarrassed.”

“I’m not- I’m not *embarrassed*.” Richie sputters but he can feel himself turning red and he buries his face in Eddie’s collarbone to hide it. He licks at the scar in what is almost a fucked-up kind of apology for his own cowardice.

Eddie lets him, lets the subject drop, and lets Richie slide his pants off and push up against him, grinding his erection into Eddie’s hip. Eddie gives him everything he wants and takes it right back in kind, wrapping his hand around Richie’s dick and panting into his ear, curling into him.

“Do you want to- do you want to fuck me?” Eddie asks him, almost unsure, and Richie wonders if the bossiness had been something of a cover all this time, a mask just like Richie’s stupid dirty jokes.

“I do.” Richie says, “I really fucking do.”

When he’s up with his back against the headboard and Eddie in his lap, Richie takes his time to open him up, nice and slow and making it last. For once Eddie doesn’t bitch about the foreplay or try and hurry him along, he just takes it, sweetly, muttering nonsense words against Richie’s neck.

“Oh fuck, oh god, keep your fingers like that, just like that Richie yeah.” He’s saying and it’s almost unintelligible because Richie keeps

kissing him through it.

“You like it? I can keep going baby, all night long if you want it,” he says and Eddie actually *growls* at him, letting out a near-sob of frustration.

Richie laughs and then because Eddie really has been good, waiting this long without yelling, he lines himself up and says, “Come on then, show me what you want. Show me how much you want me.”

“God, your ego.” Eddie says brokenly, but he’s easing himself down on Richie’s dick, making little hissing noises all the way.

“That’s good, you’re doing so good baby.” Richie tells him, petting at his sides and watching the way the muscles in Eddie’s shoulders tense and move under the sheen of sweat on his skin. “You look so fucking good like this.”

The sun is shining through the window onto the bed and Richie is suddenly, horribly grateful for how bare and boxy his apartment is, because there’s nothing else to distract from this, Eddie’s skin against the white sheet and the dark hair falling in his eyes.

“God, I just need to- can I just?” Eddie says when he’s fully seated and Richie just nods, saying “Yeah, anything, whatever you want.”

Eddie lifts himself up, hands over Richie’s head, rattling the headboard in a way that makes Richie grateful it’s not a shared wall,

not that he would give a fuck, because he can't think of anything else but the way Eddie is fucking himself on Richie's dick, like a pro, like a *champ*.

He can hear himself saying, *oh my god, oh my god*, but distantly, from far away, and he has to bite Eddie's shoulder to stop himself from coming almost instantly. Eddie fucking *keens* when he does it and his movements become frenzied in Richie's lap, saying, "Jesus, touch me, already, c'mon."

Richie takes him in hand, relieved that the bossiness is still there after all, and thinks desperately, *God, I love you*.

And then because he can, he says it out loud, closing his eyes against Eddie's chest, his heart practically slamming out of his ears.

"I do, Eddie, fuck, I love you so much, you have no idea." He says, and then Eddie looks down at him, mouth open, and says, "Me too, oh God, I love you too."

It's the dirtiest, sexiest thing Eddie's ever said to him and Richie comes with a groan, stuttering his hips up into Eddie's body.

It's so intense his toes are fucking curling, but he can't bask in the afterglow, not when Eddie is still on the edge and gasping. Richie pulls out and rolls until Eddie is under him, trapped between his body and the bed and then jerks him off steadily, kissing him until Eddie is shaking apart underneath him.

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Sometime after that when they've both showered and Richie has scrounged up coffee grounds from the back of his kitchen cabinet, he gets a call from an unknown number on his phone.

"You got Richie." He says perkily when he picks up.

"So, listen, I think I've given you enough time to think things over." The voice says from over the phone, nasal and whiny. "Do we have a deal or not?"

"Hmm, let me think about that one." Richie says and then takes a loud slurp of coffee from his mug.

Across the kitchen counter, Eddie raises an eyebrow and Richie covers the receiver and hisses, "It's our *mutual friend* on the line."

"Let's not mess around here." The guy says over the line. "We both know you don't want this getting out. I'm offering you protection here."

"Oh yeah, sure, sure." Richie says deadpan, rolling his eyes. "You're such a sweetheart to care."

Eddie scowls and then gestures for the phone.

Richie holds up a finger and then says sweetly into the phone, “You know I’ve got someone here who would just love to meet you.”

“Wha-“

Richie holds the phone out and Eddie hesitates before taking it, quirking an eyebrow.

“Are you sure Rich? This could still be a lot of hassle- do you really want it all out there?”

“I was getting kind of bored of the cloak and dagger anyway.” Richie says and then, more seriously, “Let’s do this. I’ve always wanted to cause a scandal.”

Eddie smirks and takes the phone and then for the next two minutes gives the nastiest, most brutal attack on a human being that Richie has ever been witness to. Eddie doesn’t pause, doesn’t let the guy get a word in edgeways, seemingly not needing to take a breath in between insults and finally the would-be blackmailer hangs up, leaving Eddie scowling at a blank screen.

“Douchebag.” Eddie spits. “I hadn’t finished.”

“Oh, I think you finished him babe.” Richie says. “K fucking O.”

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Eddie must have struck a nerve because the article when it comes out is pretty nasty, even by L.A celebrity gossip monger standards.

*Comedian Richie Tozier CAUGHT ON CAMERA With Secret Boy-Toy, Eddie Kaspbrak ; the headline screams, and then below it, Photos Show 43-Year-Old Comedian Locking Lips With ‘Bosom Buddy’ Racecar Driver.*

“Boy toy?!” Eddie snarls, disgusted, leaning over Richie’s shoulder to read his phone.

“I’m only forty.” Richie says sadly. “Eddie, am I old?”

“You’re younger than me.” Eddie says, and then, disgusted, “*Boy toy. We should fucking sue.*”

Richie considers it and then retweets the article with a bunch of love hearts. Then, as an afterthought he captions it, *my boyfriend is cooler than your boyfriend. B) also this ‘journalist’ is a piece of shit.*

“Okay?” He asks Eddie before posting and Eddie reads it over his shoulder and snorts.

“Go for it.” Eddie says and then looks down at his phone buzzing. “That’s probably my manager. Or the others. Should I answer?”

Richie shrugs and twists around to kiss him.

“Let them wait a little.” He says. “We’ve got time to work all that out later.”

They did; they had the rest of their lives.